



WHY RENEW 0.75% SALES TAX BOND ISSUE TO BE SHARED BY FORT SMITH FIRE DEPARTMENT?

JANUARY 17, 2012

THE NECESSITY OF FIRE SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

CURRENT RESPONSE TIMES

In the City of Fort Smith, the average response times are:

Pumper¹ – 3 minutes & 13 seconds

Ladder² – 4 minutes & 10 seconds

Except for property owners in Chaffee Crossing and some parts of south Fort Smith, where average response times are:

Pumper – 7 to 8 minutes

Ladder – 8 to 10 minutes

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Brain death begins to occur within 4 to 6 minutes after cardiac arrest, and it is imperative that a pumper, with firefighters trained in medical emergencies, arrive within that timeframe so that rescue efforts can begin.

A medium-sized fire will double in size every 60 seconds. The sooner firefighters can begin suppression measures, the greater chance of minimizing loss of life or property.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Fort Smith has recently been reviewed by Insurance Services Office (ISO) – the organization utilized by many insurance companies for setting property insurance rates – and will most likely return in the fall of 2013. The comprehensive report issued by ISO makes it clear that, unless deficiencies are addressed in the next 2 years, we will be unable to maintain our Class 2 rating. This will result in higher property insurance premiums for citizens and businesses.

Loss of a Class 2 ISO rating will result in a higher cost of living, less attractive community for economic development prospects (by having a lower level of public safety services), and severe limits on new growth.

THREE-PHASE PLAN OF ACTION – ATTACH ESTIMATED COST TO EACH PHASE

The Fort Smith Fire Department, in reviewing the ISO report issued in June 2011, has identified three separate – but related – steps that will protect Fort Smith's Class 2 rating going forward. The plan strengthens areas of needed improvement, as identified by ISO. More importantly, the plan will result in improving safety for all citizens, and for firefighters.

New Fire Station at Chaffee Crossing – \$3 million³

Repair / Improvements of Existing Stations – \$1.25 million⁴

Capital Equipment - \$4.3 million⁵

Redistribution of ladder trucks – contingent on acquisition of 3 pumpers, 2 ladders, and a Quint apparatus

¹ A pumper and crew act as a first responder to an emergency – assisting in medical calls and fire events. How quickly a pumper arrives at the scene can determine the outcome of any emergency.

² A ladder is required at fully-involved structure fires. A ladder's prompt arrival at the scene can mean determine whether or not a structure can be saved.

³ This is an approximate cost – further work is underway for a more precise cost of constructing a new fire station already-acquired property at Chaffee Crossing

⁴ Roof repairs, security, repairs for sanitary & health safety, purchase of new emergency generators

⁵ Replacing 3 pumpers and 2 ladders with approximately 20 to 25 years of service, and acquiring a "Quint" apparatus

FUNDING THE PLAN OF ACTION

The only option for implementing all improvements to be in place for the next ISO review in 2013 is to commit a portion of an existing one percent sales tax for a bond issuance. There will be no increase in sales taxes to support the improvements.

This method of funding the plan not only provides funding to begin the implementation of the plan almost immediately following an election, a temporary sales tax also means that half the cost of the improvements will be funded by those not living in Fort Smith.

Currently, a one percent sales tax is allocated to EPA-mandated wet weather improvements. The citizens of Fort Smith would be asked later this year to renew the one percent to authorize additional sales tax bonds to continue the sewer work and to fund the fire service improvements. These two projects – the fire service improvements and the sanitary sewer improvements – must be posed as separate questions on the ballot.

FAQ

What is the “ISO fire rating” & why is it so important?

ISO collects information on municipal fire-protection efforts in communities throughout the United States. In each of those communities, ISO analyzes the relevant data using their Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). ISO assigns a Public Protection Classification from 1 to 10. Class 1 generally represents superior property fire protection, and Class 10 indicates that the area's fire-suppression program doesn't meet ISO's minimum criteria.

By classifying communities' ability to suppress fires, ISO helps the communities evaluate their public fire-protection services. The program provides an objective, countrywide standard that helps fire departments in planning and budgeting for facilities, equipment, and training. And by securing lower fire insurance premiums for communities with better public protection, the PPC program provides incentives and rewards for communities that choose to improve their firefighting services.

ISO has extensive information on more than 44,000 fire-response jurisdictions.⁶

How are my sales taxes currently allocated?

Of the 9.25 percent sales tax in the City of Fort Smith here's a breakdown of where the funds are allocated:

6.00% - State of Arkansas (1.5% on groceries as of July 1, 2011)
1.00% - Sebastian County
0.25% - UA-Fort Smith
1.00% - City of Fort Smith Capital Improvements Program (Streets & Drainage)
1.00% - City of Fort Smith Wet Weather Sanitary Sewer Improvements

Will the city pursue federal grant money?

The Fort Smith Fire Department has pursued federal funds for almost four years, to no avail. The “shovel ready” funds have been allocated and it is not anticipated that any new federal funds will be available in the foreseeable future.

For more information go to the City of Fort Smith web site – Fire Department improvement tab

<http://fortsmithar.gov/firedepartment/default.aspx>

WHAT DOES RENEWAL OF THIS 0.75% DO FOR ME?

- Ensures the likelihood that Fort Smith keeps its ISO 2 rating (not causing an immediate rise in our fire policy insurance rates)
- Provides necessary training and equipment to keep firefighters safe
- Ensures rapid emergency response times throughout Fort Smith
- Keeps our tax rates the same

⁶ <http://www.isomitigation.com/ppc/0000/ppc0001.html>